


EDUCATION WEEK

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REPORT ROUNDUP

Lack of Proof Seen on Reading Text

Houghton Mifflin Reading, a popular textbook for  [Back to Story](#)

teaching literacy in the early grades, cannot be given an effectiveness rating by the What Works Clearinghouse because existing research provides insufficient evidence of its impact on student learning, according to a [report](#) released last week by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences.

The textbook is the latest of several widely used early reading series that failed to meet the rigorous review standards of the online clearinghouse, which evaluates data on educational programs and practices.

Last month, reports by the clearinghouse on *Open Court Reading* and *Reading Mastery*, as well as Breakthrough to Literacy—all products of the New York City-based McGraw-Hill Cos.—contended that no studies that met the clearinghouse's rigorous review requirements.

The latest review looked at nine studies of *Houghton Mifflin Reading* between 1985 and 2007. The text is one of just two approved for use in California elementary schools, and is used across the country.

Six of the studies on the program had the necessary experimental design to be included in the review, but they either did not have sufficient information about the comparison group or there were "confounding factors" that made it impossible to determine the effect of the program on student outcomes, the new report says. Another study was rejected because it did not have an equivalent comparison group, while two others did not have sufficient information on the ages or grade ranges of students being studied.

Company Defends Product

The publisher, based in Boston, said the findings do not reflect the program's success.

"For over a decade, the *Houghton Mifflin Reading* series have boosted student reading ability and achievement in schools throughout the nation," spokesman Rick Blake wrote in an e-mail. "We believe the results in the classroom speak for themselves."

The report is part of a series of reviews on beginning reading programs that the clearinghouse began releasing last year. Only a handful of the dozens of programs the

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clearinghouse studied were determined to have any positive effects on student learning. Those results have led many reading research experts to question the usefulness of the reviews.

By Kathleen Kennedy Manzo

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What Works Clearinghouse



Beginning Reading

September 2008

Houghton Mifflin Reading[®]

Effectiveness

No studies of *Houghton Mifflin Reading*[®] that fall within the scope of the Beginning Reading review meet WWC evidence standards. The lack of studies meeting WWC evidence standards means that, at this time, the WWC is unable to draw any conclusions based on research about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of *Houghton Mifflin Reading*[®].

Program Description¹

The *Houghton Mifflin Reading*[®] system is a reading program for instruction in grades K – 6. It uses Big Books (authentic literature), anthologies, Read Alouds, and audio compact discs to provide step-by-step instruction in reading. According to the developer's website, *Houghton Mifflin Reading*[®] was developed based on the findings of the National Reading Panel. The product is designed to be used as a full-year curriculum program

with instruction on developing oral language and comprehension, phonemic awareness, decoding skills (phonics, analogy, context, and word recognition), fluency, reading comprehension, writing, spelling, and grammar. Instruction is organized by a set of themes (10 for grades K-1 and 6 for grades 2-6) with selected Big Books (fiction and non-fiction literature) and other classroom activities to highlight the theme.

The WWC identified 9 studies of *Houghton Mifflin Reading*[®] that were published or released between 1985 and 2007.

Six studies are within the scope of the review and have an eligible design, but do not meet WWC evidence standards.

One study is out of the scope of the review because it has an ineligible study design that does not meet WWC evidence standards, such as having no comparison group.

- Two studies do not establish that the comparison group was comparable to the treatment group prior to the start of the intervention.
- Four studies have confounding factors, such as combining with other interventions, which makes it impossible to attribute the observed effect solely to *Houghton Mifflin Reading*[®].

Two studies are out of the scope of the review, as defined by the Beginning Reading protocol, because they do not disaggregate the findings for the age or grade range specified in the protocol.

¹The descriptive information for this program was obtained from a publicly-available source: the program's website (www.eduplace.com, downloaded July 2008). The WWC requests developers to review the program description sections for accuracy from their perspective. Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this program is beyond the scope of this review.

Studies that fall outside the Beginning Reading protocol or do not meet evidence standards

Barnes, S. (2007). *The effects of curriculum structure on the achievement of grade 3 and grade 5 mobile students as measured by the Maryland school assessment*. Unpublished dissertation, Duquesne University: Pittsburgh, PA. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because the intervention and comparison groups are not shown to be equivalent at baseline.

EDSTAR. (2002). *Analysis of the effects of using Houghton Mifflin Reading programs on reading test scores in Chicago Public Schools*. Raleigh, NC: EDSTAR Inc. The study is ineligible for review because it does not disaggregate findings for the age or grade range specified in the protocol.

Foorman, B. R., Schatschneider, C., Eakin, M. N., Fletcher, J. M., Moats, L. C., & Francis, D. J. (2006). The impact of instructional practices in grades 1 and 2 on reading and spelling achievement in high poverty schools. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 31(1), 1-29. The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.

Haager, D., Dhar, R., Moulton, M., & Varma, S. (2005). *Reading First year 3 evaluation report*. Morgan Hill, CA: Educational Data Systems. The study did not meet WWC evidence standards — the measures of effect cannot be attributed solely to the intervention — the intervention was combined with another intervention.

Additional sources:

Haager, D., Dhar, R., Moulton, M., & McMillan, S. (2006).

Reading First year 4 evaluation report. Morgan Hill, CA: Educational Data Systems.

Haager, D., Dhar, R., Moulton, M., & McMillan, S. (2008).

Reading First year 5 evaluation report. Morgan Hill, CA: Educational Data Systems.

Levin, J., Haertel, E., Kirst, M., & Williams, T. (2006). *Similar students, different results: Why do some schools do better?*

Additional findings: Elementary school curriculum program and API: A more detailed examination. Mountain View, CA: Edsource.

The study is ineligible for review because it does not disaggregate findings for the age or grade range specified in the protocol.

Ryder, R. J., Burton, J. L., & Silberg, A. (2006). Longitudinal study of direct instruction effects from first through third grades. *Journal of Educational Research*, 99(3), 180-191. The study did not meet WWC evidence standards because the measures of effect cannot be attributed solely to the intervention — there was only one unit of analysis in one or both conditions.

Swartz, J & Johnston, K. (2003). *Efficacy study of Houghton*

Mifflin Reading: A legacy of literacy, final report. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates.

The study did not meet WWC evidence standards because the intervention and comparison groups are not shown to be equivalent at baseline.